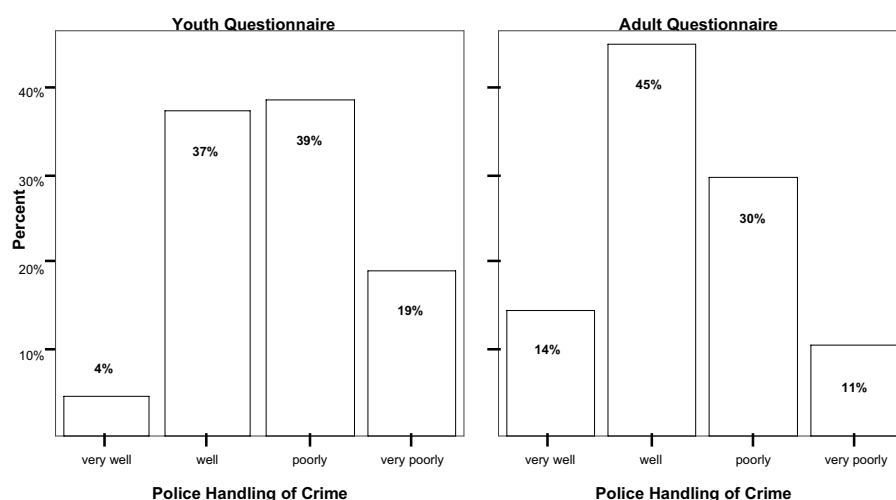


## Section 6: Police Responses to Crime

The issue of the role played by police in responding to organised crime gangs and youth gangs has been very controversial (Collins *et al.*, 2000). The NSW Police Service has had to endure recent investigation into police corruption in general, and police racism in particular (Chan 1997). Images of police walking *en masse* down Canterbury streets have been frequently seen in newspaper and television coverage over the past two and a half years. We were interested to get adult and youth perceptions of the role of the police in responding to gangs, youth and crime in Sydney.

The majority of the adults surveyed in Sydney thought that the police were doing a good job in responding to organised crime. As Figure 6.1 shows, nearly two out of every three adults (59%) surveyed thought that the Police were handling organised crime ‘very well’ or ‘well’. On the other hand, 41% thought that the police handled crime ‘poorly’ or ‘very poorly’.

Figure 6.1: How Well the Police are Handling Organised Crime



The attitudes of these Sydney adults to the police are not surprising—the community at large has mixed feelings about the police. The attitudes of the youth we surveyed were not as positive as the adult views. Six out of every ten youth surveyed (59.1%) rated police handling of organized crime in their area as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’. Four in ten youth surveyed (41.9%) thought that the Police were handling organised crime ‘very well’ or ‘well’.

Table 6.1 presents data from this question for each LGA participating in the Sydney survey. This shows that people living in the Canterbury LGA were more likely to rate police handling of organized crime as ‘well’ or ‘very-well’ (two in three or 66.6%) than other Sydney LGAs. Rockdale and Hurstville were the only other areas where more than half of the respondents rated police handling of organized crime as ‘well’ or ‘very-well’. On the other hand, police handling of organized crime was ranked lowest in Auburn, Bankstown and Liverpool LGAs.

Table 6.1: How Well the Police are Handling Organised Crime (by LGA)

Police Handling of Crime	Local Government Area							
	Auburn	Banks-town	Canter-bury	Fair-field	Hurst-ville	Liver-pool	Rock-dale	Total
Very well	4.2	4.7	12.1	19.6	12.3	5.3	7.0	9.4
Well	33.3	34.4	54.5	31.5	38.5	38.9	49.0	40.1
Poorly	43.1	39.8	21.2	35.9	34.6	42.1	28.0	34.8
Very poorly	19.4	21.1	12.1	13.0	14.6	13.7	16.0	15.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*Figures expressed as percentages

There is also a gender dimension to responses to this question, as Table 6.2 shows. While over half of the females surveyed (51.2%) rated police handling of organised crime as ‘very well’ or ‘well’, only 43.7% of males did so.

Table 6.2: How Well the Police are Handling Organised Crime (by gender, %)

	Males	Females	Total
Very well	8.5	9.5	9
well	35.2	41.7	41.1
poorly	37.8	31.7	34.7
very poorly	18.5	12.1	15.5

We also asked the opinions of adults and youth regarding how well they thought that the police were handling youth gangs (as distinct from organised crime)—see Figure 6.2. This time, adults were more likely to rate police handling of youth gangs as ‘well’ or ‘very well’ (56%) than youth (36%). We can also break these results down for each LGA, as Table 6.3 shows. The LGAs where over 50% of respondents rated police handling of youth gangs as ‘very well’ or ‘well’ are Rockdale (53.7%), Canterbury (52%) and Fairfield (53.2%). Police rated lowest on the youth gang front in Auburn, Bankstown and Liverpool. There is also a gender dimension of these responses. As Table 6.4 shows, females were more likely to rank police handling of youth gangs as ‘very well’ or ‘well’ (56%) than were males (43.7%).

Table 6.3: How well the Police are Handling Youth Gangs (by LGA %)

Police Handling of Youth Gangs	Local Government Areas							
	Auburn	Banks-town	Canter-bury	Fair-field	Hurst-ville	Liver-pool	Rock-dale	Total
Very well	4.2	3.1	8.0	21.7	13.3	6.2	8.4	9.3
Well	31.9	32.8	44.0	31.5	32.8	32.0	45.3	35.7
Poorly	48.6	46.1	40.0	32.6	38.3	48.5	29.5	40.4
Very poorly	15.3	18.0	8.0	14.1	15.6	13.4	16.8	14.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*Figures expressed as percentages

Figure 6.2: How Well the Police are Handling Youth Gangs

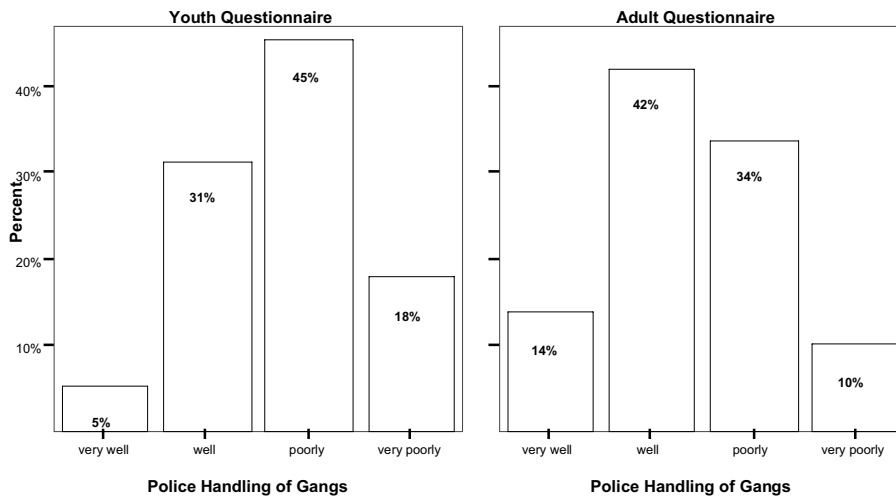
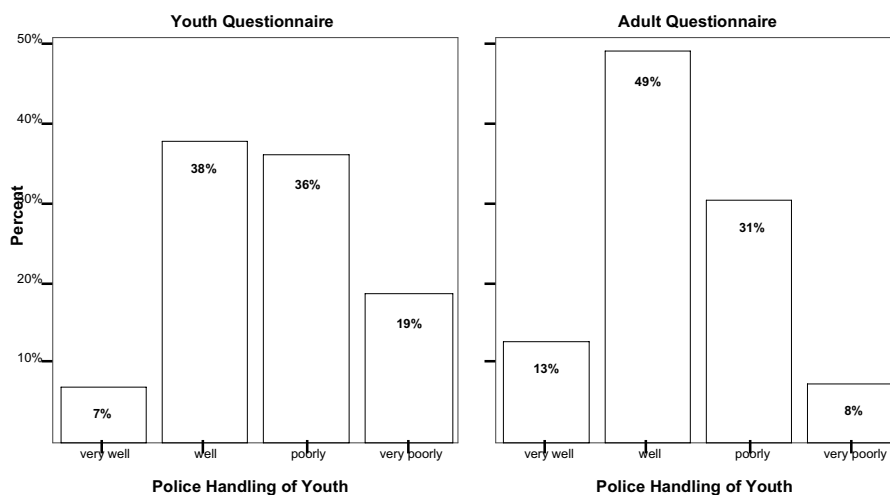


Table 6.4: How Well the Police are Handling Youth Gangs (by gender %)

	Males	Females	Total
Very well	8.5	9.5	9
well	35.2	46.5	41.1
poorly	37.8	31.7	34.7
very poorly	18.5	12.1	15.2

Finally we asked our sample how well they thought police were handling young people in Sydney. The adult responses supported the police in this regard, with supporters outnumbering opponents about 62% to 39% (Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3: How Well the Police are Handling Young People



Young people were not so enthusiastic, with 55% of youth rating police handling of youth in general as poor or very poor. Nevertheless, opinion is clearly split among youth, with 45% police handling of youth as ‘very well’ or ‘well’

Table 6.5 shows results to this question by LGA. A pattern emerges similar to other questions about police action: they were ranked highest in Canterbury, Rockdale, and Hurstville and lowest in Auburn, Bankstown and Liverpool. There is also a gender dimension to these responses. As Table 6.6 shows, females were more likely to rank police handling of youth gangs as 'very well' or 'well' (57.4%) than were males (47.7%).

Table 6.5: How Well the Police are Handling Young People (by LGA)

Police Handling of Youth	Local Government Area							
	Auburn	Banks-town	Canter-bury	Fair-field	Hurst-ville	Liver-pool	Rock-dale	Total
Very well	5.6	3.3	7.2	19.6	12.2	7.9	11.1	9.5
Well	38.0	38.2	52.6	35.9	42.0	41.6	48.5	42.4
Poorly	38.0	40.7	32.0	32.6	32.8	32.7	29.3	34.0
Very poorly	18.3	17.9	8.2	12.0	13.0	17.8	11.1	14.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*Figures expressed as percentages

Table 6.6: How Well the Police are Handling Young People (by gender, %)

	Males	Females	Total
Very well	9.2	10.3	9.8
well	38.5	47.1	42.9
poorly	34	33.1	33.5
very poorly	18.2	9.5	13.8

Adults surveyed overwhelmingly (86.4%) agreed with the proposition that police should be tougher on youth gangs, as Table 6.7 shows. It is interesting that three out of four youth surveyed (75.5%) also agreed to this proposition. This highlights the need to view youth as *victims* of youth crime in general and youth gangs in particular, not just as the perpetrators of crime.

Table 6.7: Should Police be Tougher on Youth Gangs (by age, %)

	Youth	Adults	Total
Yes (nos.)	332	317	649
Yes (%)	75.5%	86.4%	80.4%
No (nos.)	108	50	158
No (%)	24.5%	13.6%	19.6%

Relations between police and youth are often fairly heated and contentious. This is particularly the case on the streets of Bankstown after the police offensive following the stabbing of Edward Lee in October 1998. Many youths view this as yet another instance of police racism directed towards them (Collins *et al.*, 2000: 171-198). There is strong evidence of police racism in multicultural cities across the world (Collins *et al.* 2000: 88-9) and in Sydney in particular (Collins *et al.*, 2000: 90-92; 171-2; 190-2; 237-8).

We wanted to investigate how our respondents felt about the relations between police and youth from ethnic minorities so we asked if those youth and adults thought that police picked on some groups of young people, and if so, to identify these groups.

Table 6.8: Do Police Pick on Groups of Young People (by gender and age %)

	Yes	No
Males	56.5%	43.5%
Females	52.8%	47.2%
Youth	62.8%	37.2%
Adults	44.8%	55.2%

These results are shown in Table 6.8. Overall, a slight majority of those surveyed agreed that police did pick on groups of young people, with males slightly more likely to agree to this proposition than females. When age of respondents is considered, it is clear that two in every three youth surveyed (62.8%) thought that police picked on groups of young people. There is also a spatial dimension to this question of police picking on youth from particular backgrounds. As Table 6.9 shows, two in three people who live in Auburn, Fairfield and Rockdale LGAs believe that police do pick on youth from particular backgrounds, as do more than half of those who live in Bankstown, Hurstville and Canterbury LGAs. In Liverpool, only one third of the respondents thought that this was so.

Table 6.9: Do Police Pick on Groups of Young People (by LGA)

Local Government Area	Yes	Yes %
Auburn	45	62%
Bankstown	69	56%
North Shore	13	42%
Canterbury	53	51%
Fairfield	59	62%
Hurstville	74	57%
Liverpool	41	39%
Rockdale	61	62%
Miscellaneous	20	37%
Total	435	55%

Adults asked to identify these groups most often mentioned immigrants from Asia, the Middle East and Lebanon, with Pacific Islanders also mentioned. Those youth surveyed, named Asian, Lebanese, Middle Eastern and Islander youth as those who they thought suffered police harassment in the Sydney area—see Figure 6.4 on next page. Most adults did not believe that police did harass ethnic groups of youth but those who disagreed nominated youth from Asian, Chinese, Lebanese, Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders as victims of police harassment in the area.

Figure 6.4: Groups Identified as Being Picked on by Police—Youth

